

National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week

National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week is November 15-21, 2009. Every year, in the spirit of Thanksgiving and education, the National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness co-sponsor National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week, one week prior to Thanksgiving. During this week, schools, communities and cities throughout the nation endeavor to bring a greater awareness to the issues of hunger and homelessness.

Last year the national poverty rate rose to include 39.8 million Americans, 13.2 percent of the population, up from 12.5 percent in 2007. More than 36 million people were at risk of suffering from hunger in the United States, including 1 in 3 children. In addition, 3.5 million people were forced to sleep in parks, under bridges, in shelter or cars. The combination of the high cost of living, low-wage jobs, and high unemployment rates only exacerbate these problems and force countless Americans to choose between food, housing, and other expenses. Studies show that money devoted to food is typically the first to be sacrificed. Families will often pay their fixed payments first, such as rent and utilities, rather than pay for food. Bread for the World reported that 35% of Americans had to choose between food and rent, while 28% had to choose between medical care and food, in the first half of 2004. For information on what it costs to maintain a family of four, please see <http://www.usccb.org/cchd/povertyusa/tour.htm>.

The rise in the poverty rate, the highest since 1997, may mean an even larger poverty increase in 2009 with higher unemployment rates than last year. Median family incomes also fell in 2008, being lower than the prior decade and wiping out the income gains of the previous three years. Lack of health insurance for many families exacerbates these issues.

Homelessness has a devastating impact on homeless children and youth's educational opportunities. Residency requirements, guardianship requirements, delays in transfer of school records, lack of transportation, and lack of immunization records often prevent homeless children from enrolling in school. Homeless children and youth who are able to enroll in school still face barriers to regular attendance: while 87% of homeless youth are enrolled in school, only 77% attend school regularly (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

The struggles faced by those that lack a home are often lonely and certainly difficult. Bringing attention to the plight of the homeless by participating in this week of awareness may foster greater understanding and solidarity. This week also provides a great opportunity for community agencies to become involved with local schools and provide mentoring for homeless students. For tools to inspire your community to get involved with National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week, view this link <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/projects/awareness/2009manual.pdf>. Other ideas include: an awareness walk ending with a food drive at a local food pantry, an appreciation day to recognize people who are making efforts to end hunger and homelessness and a volunteer day call to the public to spend part of their day volunteering with an organization that helps to end hunger and homelessness.

Other resources include:

In Their Own Voices – a 15 minute video about children speaking about being homeless that can be shown to staff during National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week. If you would like to borrow a copy of this video, contact Wisconsin Child Care Information Center (CCIC), 2109 South Stoughton Road, Madison, Wisconsin 53716 800 362-7353 ■ 608 224-5388 ■ 608 224-6178 (fax)
ccic@dpi.wi.gov

NEWIST at CESA 7, Green Bay – has produced videos on poverty and teachers guides. Information is available at <http://www.ecb.org>.

UW Extension – offers a new curriculum titled *Poverty Awareness for Community Engagement (PACE)*. Your local UW Extension county agent can be reached at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/>

Green Bay School District – has a service learning unit on Nutrition and Well-Being which addresses hunger and poverty. Contact Michelle Eberhardt at MEBERHAR@greenbay.k12.wi.us for additional information.

The Corporation for National and Community Service has a Resource Center where programs and schools can be part of an information exchange. Example of effective practices for working with homeless youth can be found on the website, <http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/effective-practice>. Examples of effective practices include partnering with a bakery to provide breakfast to low-income schools and starting a homeless garden project.

Lastly, the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) at <http://www.serve.org/nche> is an excellent resource on poverty and homelessness issues.

We hope you will consider initiating some kind of awareness activity during National Hunger and Homeless Awareness Week. Please contact Mary Maronek at mary.maronek@dpi.gov.us or Jen Rubin at jennifer.rubin@dpi.gov.wi for additional information.